

My Young Child Shows Some Puzzling Behaviors. What Do I Do Now?

As a parent, you know your child best. You, your friends, relatives, or doctor may have noticed that your child:

- Does not look at you when you talk to him/her
- Does not look where you look
- Does not point to what he/she wants or to show you things
- Does not respond when you call his/her name
- Does not babble by 12 months of age
- Does not use words by 16 months
- Moves away from familiar people to play alone
- Avoids physical contact such as hugging or cuddling
- Does not understand much of what is said to him/her
- Does not use meaningful phrases by 24 months
- Has lost language skills he/she once had
- Uses unusual or repetitive language
- Shows unusual play habits (lines toys in rows, spins parts of toys)
- Reacts strongly to a change in routine
- Has unusual sleep and eating patterns

If you think your child shows any of these behaviors, contact your local Early Intervention Program for a free developmental screening. Staff will help you decide whether additional evaluations are necessary.

It is important to find help as soon as you have a concern. Your child needs the right start relating to other children and adults, understanding and using language, learning to play, and adapting to everyday changes.

What Might These Behaviors Mean?

Puzzling behavior might indicate that a child has a neurological problem known as an *autism spectrum disorder* if there is a pattern of unusual development or delays in three general areas:

- Social interaction
- Communication
- Play and interest in activities

An autism spectrum disorder can be evaluated by a physician, neurologist, psychiatrist, or psychologist familiar with the spectrum. Children on this spectrum show a wide variety of skills, delays, and behaviors.

There is no single known cause of autism spectrum disorders. Researchers believe several genes, as well as environmental factors, may contribute to autism. Autism affects people of all races and ethnic groups. It is the third most common developmental disorder identified today and occurs in at least 1 in 250 people.

Other terms used to describe the autism spectrum include:

- Pervasive Developmental Disorders – Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)
- Autism
- Rett's syndrome
- Multisystem Developmental Disorder
- Asperger's syndrome

If You Have Concerns About Your Child's Development, There Is Help Available

There is evidence that children with these types of challenges can be helped by early, intensive intervention, no matter what the diagnosis may be. It is never too soon to get the right start.

What is Early Intervention?

Early Intervention is a program sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health which helps parents of children birth to three to recognize and understand their child's particular developmental needs, and shows them ways to help their child grow. The Early Intervention team works with the family. Together they determine what type of help would be most beneficial and then write an **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**. The IFSP specifies all the education, training and support services a family will receive to best help their child.

Specialized services for a child with a diagnosis on the autism spectrum can be part of the IFSP.

Who are Specialty Service Providers?

Specialty Service Provider agencies have been approved by The Department of Public Health to provide intensive services for children with autism spectrum disorders because they have particular expertise in this area. Staff from these programs use structured, highly individualized treatment programs to promote social skills and communication and to manage behavior that interferes with learning. They will collaborate with the Early Intervention Program to deliver a comprehensive program to your child and family.

Who Can Help and How?

Talk with your Early Intervention Program about accessing Specialty Services. If you are not already enrolled in an Early Intervention Program, call the *Central Directory for Early Intervention* at 800-905-8437 or 1-617-624-5070 (voice) or 1-617-624-5992 (TTY) to find an Early Intervention Program in your community. Website:

www.mass.gov/dph/earlyintervention

What Are the Costs?

There is an Annual Service Fee for Early Intervention that is based on family size and income. It ranges from \$0 to \$500 per year. Specialty Service Programs are provided at no direct cost to the family. Early Intervention services are supported by The Massachusetts Department of Public Health, MassHealth, and health insurance companies.

Is Your Child Developing in Ways That Puzzle You?



Remember!
Much of a child's
most important learning
takes place in the first three
years. If you have questions
about your child's development,
behavior, or learning style, Early
Intervention can help.

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Low Incidence Committee